Pavel Bazov

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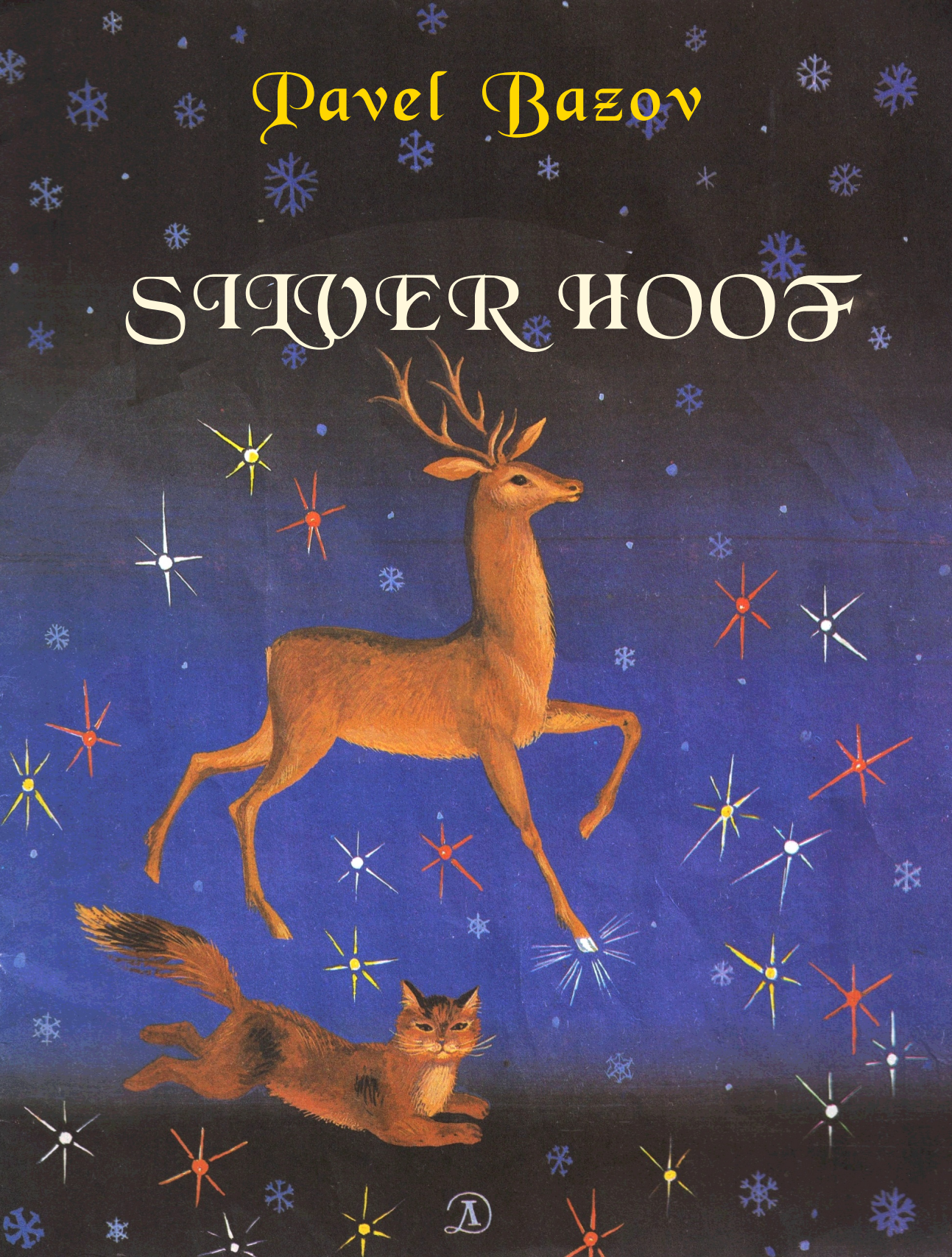

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SILVER HOOF

Translated by Eve Manning, Illustrated by O. Popkova

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There was an old man used to live in our village called Kokovanya. He'd none of his own family left, so he thought he'd take some orphan into his hut to be a child to him.

He asked the neighbours if they knew of anyone, and they told him: "Grigory Potapov's children were left orphans on Glinka not long ago. The bailiff sent the older girls to the manor sewing-room, but there's a little girl of six nobody wanted. That would be the child for ye."

But Kokovanya said: "I'd be unhandy-like wi' a lass. A lad'd be better. I'd teach him my trade and he'd help me, too, when he got bigger. But what can I do wi' a maid? What can I teach her?"

But then he thought about it all again. "I knew Grigory and his good-wife too," he said. "They were lusty workers and right merry folk. If the lass takes after them it won't be dull in the hut. I'll have her. But mebbe she won't come?"

"Eh, her life's none so sweet," the neighbours told him. "The bailiff gave Grigory's cottage to some poor devil, and told him to look after the orphan till she grows up. But he'' got a dozen of his own. They haven't enough for their own mouths. And the wife nags at the orphan child and grudges her every crust. She's little, but she's big enough to understand. She feels it. Wouldn't ye say she'd want to get away from it all? And then ye'll talk to her a bit, and she'll take to ye."

"Aye, that's true," said Kokovanya. "I'll talk to her kindly-like."

When the next Sunday came round he went to the place where the orphan lived. He found the hut crowded with folks, young and old. A little girl sat by the stove nursing a brown cat. The child was small and the cat was small too, so thin and bedraggled it was a wonder anyone would let it in. The child was stroking the cat and it purred so you could hear it all over the hut.

Kokovanya looked at the girl and asked: "Is that Grigory's giftie?"

"The same," said the goodwife. "And as if it's not enough feeding her, she's got to drag in that mangy beast too. We can't get rid of it. And it scratches the children. And then on top of all I've got to feed it!"

"They must tease it, your children,""said Kokovanya gravely. "When she has it, it

purrs." Then he turned to the child. "Well, Podaryonka [Podaryonka—a gift.—Tr], how'd ye like to come and live wi' me?"

The child stared.
"How d'ye know I'm called Daryonka?"
"It just came," he said. "I didn't think, I didn't know, I just happened on it."
"But who are you?" the child asked.
"I'm a sort of hunter," said Kokovanya. "Summer-time I wash sand and look for gold, and winters I go to the woods and look for the goat, but I never get a sight of it."
"Will ye shoot it if you do?"
"Nay," said Kokovanya, "I shoot ordinary goats, but that one won't. I want to see where he stamps his right forefoot."
"What for?"
"Come and live wi' me, and I'll tell ye all about it," said Kokovanya.

The little girl wanted very much to hear about the goat, and she could see he was a merry, kind old man. So she said: "I'll come. But take my Pussy too. Look how good she is."

"That's as sure as I stand here," said Kokovanya. "Only a fool would leave a cat that sings like that. She'll be as good as a balalaika in the hut."

The goodwife heard their talk, and she was as glad as could be to get the orphan off her hands. She started putting Daryonka's things together all in a hurry. She was afeard Kokovanya might think better of it. The cat seemed to understand all about it too. She kept rubbing up against their legs and purring: "R-r-right! You'r-r-re r-r-right!"

So Kokovanya took the orphan home. He was tall and bearded, and she was a bit of a thing with a button nose. Down the street they went with the draggled cat trotting along behind.

That was how they came to live together—Grandad Kokovanya, the orphan Daryonka and Pussy.

The days passed, they didn't get rich but they had enough and there was plenty for everyone to do.

In the morning Kokovanya went to work, Daryonka tidied the hut and made soup and porridge, while Pussy hunted mice. In the evening they were all at home, very comfortable and merry.

The old man was a wonderful teller of tales. Daryonka loved to listen, and Pussy would lie purring: "R-r-right! You'r-r-r-re r-r-r-right!" But after every story Daryonka would remind the old man: "Now, tell me about the goat, Grandad. What is he like?"

At first Kokovanya tried to put her off, but then he told her.

"That's a very special goat. On his right forefoot he's got a silver hoof. And when he stamps with that silver hoof he leaves a gem there. If he stamps once there's one gem, if he stamps twice there are two and if he begins to paw the ground there'll be a whole pile."

He told her, and then he was sorry, because after that Daryonka could talk of nothing but the goat.

"Grandad, is he a big goat?"
Kokovanya told her he was no taller than the table, with thin legs and a pretty head. But Daryonka kept on: "And has he got horns, Grandad?""
"Aye, that he has, and fine ones too. Ordinary goats have two horns but this one's got antlers, with five tines."
"And dœs he eat people, Grandad?"
"No, he dœsn't eat people, he eats grass and leaves. Well, and he may nibble a bit of hay from the stacks in winter."
"And what colour is he?"
"In summer he's brown like Pussy here, and in winter he's silver-grey."

Autumn came and Kokovanya got ready to go to the woods. He wanted to see where the goats were feeding. But then Daryonka started begging and pleading.
"Take me with ye, Grandad! I might get a look at the goat, even if he's a long way off!"

“A long way off ye wouldn’t know him,” said Kokovanya. “All goats have horns in autumn. And ye wouldn’t see how many tines there are. In the winter, now—that's different. Ordinary goats haven’t got horns then, but Silver Hoof has them all the time. So then ye can know him even when he’s far away.”

With that talk he managed to quiet her. Daryonka stopped at home while Kokovanya went to the woods. On the fifth day he came back.
“A lot of goats are feeding Poldnevsk way this year,” he said. “That’s where I’ll go when winter comes.”
“But how’ll ye sleep in the woods in winter?” asked Daryonka.
“I’’e got a bit of a hut there, by the glade where we go mowing,” he said. “It’s a stout one with a window and a stove. I'm all right there.”
Then Daryonka started off again: “Will Silver Hoof feed there too?” “Who knows? He may.”

Then the child started off with her begging and pleading: “Take me with ye, Grandad! I’ll stop in the hut. Maybe Silver Hoof’ll come up close and then I’ll see him.”

At first the old man wouldn’t hear of it. “What! Take a little girl into the woods in winter! Ye’d have to go on skis and ye don’t know how. Ye’d sink in the snow. What would I do with ye? Ye’d freeze too!”

But Daryonka wouldn’t let him alone. She kept begging: “Take me, take me, Grandad! I can ski a little bit!”

Kokovanya talked this way and that, but at last he thought to himself: “What if I do take her after all? If she tries it once she won't ask again.”

“All right,” he said, “I’ll take ye. Only see ye don’t start crying when we get to the woods or asking to go home.”
When winter was really come, Kokovanya loaded a hand sled with two sacks of rusks, some hunting supplies and other odd things he’d need of. Daryonka made herself a little bundle too. She took some scraps of cloth to make a frock for her doll, a hank of thread and a needle, and then she put in a rope too.
I may be able to catch Silver Hoof with it, she thought.

She was sorry to leave the cat, but there was naught else to be done with it. She

stroked it and talked to it, and explained all about everything.

"Grandad and I are going to the woods, Pussy, and you must stop here and catch all the mice. When we see Silver Hoof we'll come back home again and I'll tell you all about it."

Pussy looked up with cunning eyes and purred: "R-r-right! You'r-r-re r-r-right!"

So Kokovaaiya and Daryonka set off. And all the neighbours stared in amaze. "The old man must be doting! Taking a little maid like that to the woods in winter!"

Just as Kokovanya and Daryonka were leaving the last houses behind, they heard all the dogs making a big fuss and commotion, barking and howling, as though some wild beast had got in. They looked round, and there was Pussy running down the middle of the street, spitting and swearing at the dogs. Pussy was a fine big cat now, and able to look after herself. There wasn't a dog anywhere that would try a fight with her.

Daryonka wanted to catch her and take her back home, but just try to catch Pussy! She ran into the woods and up a tree in a flash. Get her out of there if you can! Daryonka called and

called, but Pussy wasn't to be lured down. So what could they do? They had to go on. And when they looked round, there was Pussy running along near them, off to one side. That was how they came at last to the hut.

So all three of them lived there. And Daryonka liked it. "Its nice here," she said. Kokovanya agreed, "Aye, it's more cheerful-like." And Pussy curled up in a ball by the stove and purred loudly: "R-r-right! You'r-r-re r-r-right!"

There were a lot of goats that winter. Ordinary goats. Kokovanya brought one or two home every day. The hides piled up and the meat was salted—far too much to be taken back on the hand sled. Kokovanya saw he would have to go home for a horse, but how could he leave Daryonka alone in the woods with only the cat? But Daryonka had got used to the woods and she spoke of it herself.

"Grandad, why don't ye go to the village for a horse? We ought to take the salt meat home."
Kokovanya was astonished.
"What a wise head on little shoulders! As sensible as a woman grown. Thought of it all by yourself. But won't ye be frightened, all alone?"

"Why'd I be frightened?" she answered. "Ye say yourself the hut's a good strong one, the wolves can't get in, and besides they don't come here. And I've got Pussy with me. I won't be frightened. But come back quickly all the same!"

Kokovanya left. And Daryonka stopped behind alone with Pussy. She was quite used to being alone in the daytime when Kokovanya was tracking goats. But when it began to get dark she felt a bit queer-like. So she looked at Pussy and saw she was lying comfortable and contented. That made Daryonka feel better. She sat down by the window and looked out towards the glade and—there!—something like a little ball bounced out of the woods. It came closer and she saw it was a goat. He had thin legs and a slender head, and five tines on his horns. Daryonka ran out at once, but she found nothing there. She waited and waited, and at last went back to the hut. "I must have dreamed it," she said, "it was just my-fancy."

Pussy purred: "R-r-right! You'r-r-re r-r-right!"

Daryonka went to bed taking the cat with her, and slept soundly till morning. Another day passed. No Kokovanya. Daryonka felt dull and lonely but she did not cry. Instead she stroked the cat.

"Don't fret, Pussy," she said. "Grandad'll come tomorrow, you'll see."

Pussy only sang her usual song: "R-r-right! You'r-r-re r-r-right!"

Again Daryonka sat by the window looking at the stars. She was thinking of going to bed when she suddenly heard a pitter-pitter-pat behind the wall of the hut. She jumped up, frightened, and there was the pitter-pitter-pat by the other wall, then back by the first one again, then by the door, and at last up on the roof. It was not loud, it sounded like very quick, light footsteps.

Suddenly Daryonka thought to herself: What if that's the goat that came yesterday? She wanted so badly to see it that even fright couldn't hold her back. She opened the door and peeped out, and there was the goat, quite close, standing as quiet as could be. It raised its front foot to stamp and a silver hoof gleamed on it, and the horns

had five tines. Daryonka did not know what to do, so she called it as she would an ordinary nannie or billie.

How that goat laughed! Then he turned and ran across the glade. Daryonka went back into the hut and told Pussy all about it.

"I've seen Silver Hoof. I saw his horns and I saw his hoof. Only I didn't see him stamp and leave precious stones. He'll show me that next time."

Pussy sang her usual song: "R-r-right! You'r-r-re r-r-right!"

The third day passed and still no Kokovanya. Daryonka's face was quite clouded. She

even cried a bit. She wanted to talk to Pussy, but Pussy was gone. Then Daryonka got really frightened and ran out to look for the cat.

It was a light night with a full moon. Daryonka looked round and there was the cat, quite close, sitting in the glade with the goat in front of her. Pussy was nodding her head and so was the goat, as if they were having a talk. Then they began running about on the snow.

The goat ran here and ran there, then he stopped and stamped. They ran about the glade for a long time, and disappeared in the distance. Then they came right up to the hut again. The goat jumped up on the roof and began stamping with his silver hoof. And precious stones flashed out like sparks—red, green, light blue—every kind and colour.

It was then that Kokovanya returned. But he did not know his hut. It was covered with precious stones, sparkling and winking in all colours. And there stood the goat on top, stamping and stamping with his silver hoof, and the stones kept rolling and rolling down.

Suddenly Pussy jumped up there too and stood beside the goat purring loudly—and then there was nothing, no Pussy and no Silver Hoof. Kokovanya scooped up half a hatful of stones, but Daryonka begged him:

“Don’t touch them, Grandad! I want to look at it just as it is in the morning.” Kokovanya did as she asked. But before morning heavy snow fell and covered everything up.

They cleared the snow away afterwards, but they couldn't find anything. Well, they didn’ t do so badly after all, with what Kokovanya had collected in his hat.

So it all ended well, though it was a shame about Pussy. She was never seen again, and Silver Hoof didn't come back either. He'd come once, that was enough.

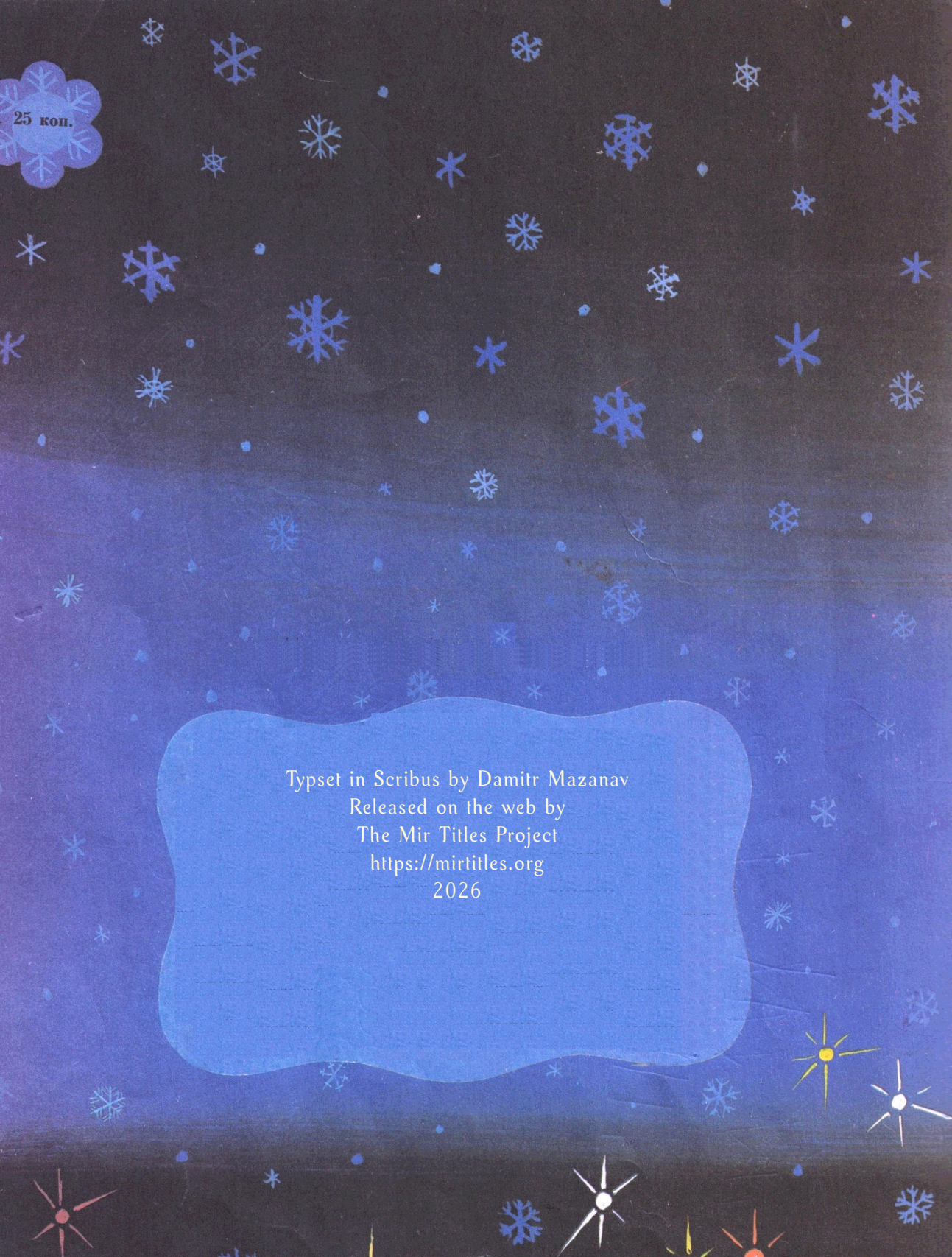
But after that people often found stones in the glade where the goat had run about. Most of them were green ones, chrysolites, folks call them.

Have you ever seen them?

Pavel Bazhov (1879— 1950) spent years collecting and studying the folklore of miners, craftsmen and factory folk of the Urals.

Bazhov wrote his original stories on the basis of legends, lays and superstitions, and they feature such fairy-tale personages as the Mistress of Copper Mountain, keeper of the fabulous mineral wealth; Poloz, the gigantic golden dragon, who rewards the valorous and punishes the villains; and the goat Silver Hoof who makes gifts of precious stones to people with a pure, kind heart.

Alongside with these myphical beings live ordinary flesh-and-blood people, among whom master-craftsmen hold a place apart. They are friends with the magic powers of the Ural Mountains, they know all the secrets of their trade and fashion the precious stones and metals into things of extraordinary beauty. As is always the case in Russian folk tales, the genuine masters are helped by good, self-sacrificing, and beautiful women.



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